

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

WASHINGTON STATE CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12 STUDENT HANDOUT, LESSON 5

THEME: AN INFORMED AND TIMELY VOTE

The call to citizens to fully utilize their voting rights and responsibilities is clearly evident in the following:

"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."
(Wendell Phillips 1811-1884)

"The only title in our democracy superior to that of President is the title of citizen."
(Justice Louis Brandeis, 1937)

The struggles of our predecessors have both bestowed and preserved the right of every qualified citizen to register and to vote. Such an endowment of democracy summons us to reply with an effort to be informed about the election process, the candidates and the issues that await us on election day.

This activity will:

1. Acquaint you, a future voter, with some information and resources available to be an informed voter.
2. Give you some tips on sorting objective sources from more biased ones as you seek to be informed.
3. Introduce you to the significant dates and deadlines of the voting/election process.

ACTIVITY: A WEB OF INFORMATION AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Let's follow the electronic road to some essential information for when the "most important" election rolls around, the one when you vote for the first time. You will be asked some questions along the way to assist you in your search. The answers may be at the end of this activity for your comparison; if they are, fold them under until you've completed the search.

Did you ever wonder where you can find which offices are subject to election in which year, how long the term is for each office, and a wealth of other information? Go to www.vote.wa.gov. Locate "Elections Menu" and position your mouse cursor over "2002 Ballot." When the menu item "Offices Subject to Election" appears, move the cursor over to it and click.

Now is the fun part! Imagine that you wish to know which offices and officials are subject to election in the year 2004. Enter that year in the space marked "Term Year" and click the "Search" icon just to the right of the year. On the page you are now viewing, the "Year" column should confirm that all these offices will be subject to a vote of the people in 2004. What else did you find?

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the first office on the list?
2. Office number 3002 shows you that the office next in line to the Governor is the ____ Governor.
3. How many State Appeals Court Judge positions will be on the ballot that year?
4. Will any State Senator positions (not Federal) be on the ballot?
5. Noting their political party listing, what do the judicial candidate positions have in common with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction position?
6. The term of office is the length of time an elected official holds office before having to be re-elected on the ballot. How many years is the length of a term for a State Supreme Court Judge?

For the next set of questions, return to www.vote.wa.gov/offices/index.tpl "Offices Subject to Election" page. Locate "OFFICES SEARCH" (mid-page, just below the colored "Legislative" banner), then find the "Select Office Type" window. Scroll your cursor down to the word "Federal," then click on the "Search" mouse icon. You should see a page with 12 elected offices.

Notice the title at the top of each column of information, for example "Incumbent." Next, click on "Definitions" in the upper left corner of the page. Read the definition for "Incumbent," then click the "Back" arrow on your browser to return to the "Federal" page.

QUESTIONS:

7. What are the names of our state's two U.S. Senators?
8. Do their terms end in the same year
9. How many years is the term of service in the U.S. House of Representatives? (Hint: Look in the far right column.)
10. What is the name of the U.S. Representative in your district?
11. In your own words, what does "Incumbent" mean?

What about local and county elected offices? Click the "Back" arrow on your browser, returning to the "Offices Subject to Election" page or go to www.vote.wa.gov/offices/index.tpl, click on "Contact Your County Auditor or Elections Department." Find your county on the list, then choose whatever method is best for you to obtain the information on local offices that are up for election.

Congratulations! Now you know how to find information about which offices are subject to election through the Secretary of State's web site. As you have observed, this information is factual, but not very helpful in assisting you with deciding how you will vote for a candidate or measure.

If you happen to be doing this assignment during the fall, you will have the opportunity to view the state voters guide for the Primary and General election. This guide includes photos and written statements by the candidates. The General guide has the "pro and con" (for and against) statements for initiatives and referenda. The guide is one of the most useful tools you can use to educate yourself about the candidates and issues on your ballot.

The State Voters Pamphlets containing information on candidates (federal and state) and statewide issues will be mailed to your permanent residence for the General election. You can always call the state's Voter Hotline or your county's Elections Division to request that one be sent to another address. Many counties have their local voters guides online as well. Don't forget that your local newspaper, both hard copy and online, will always carry information about elections that affect its readers.

"The first power reserved by the people is the initiative."
(Article II, Section 1(a), Washington State Constitution)

Washington State was among the first to adopt the initiative and referendum process when voters approved it as an Amendment to the State Constitution in 1912. This process, rooted in the state's populist beginnings, gives citizens the power to make and remake their laws and to have the final say on the decisions of their Legislature.

Next, you will visit some other sources of information that can further serve you. Go to www.vote.wa.gov. In the upper left of the page, find "Elections Menu" and scroll your cursor down to "Other Resources." When the menu appears, move your mouse to "Initiatives Main Page" and click. Here you can find up-to-date information on proposed initiative and referendum measures, including the sponsors' names, the numbers and titles of each measure, and a summary of what the measure would do if it became law.

QUESTION:

12. On an initiative of your choice, give its number, sponsor and (in one sentence) summarize what it is intended to do.

There are numerous Internet links through which you can inform yourself as a voter. Go to www.vote.wa.gov. In the upper left of the page, find "Elections Menu" and scroll your cursor down to "Other Resources." When the menu appears, move your mouse to "State Legislature" and click. You are now on the "Washington State Legislature" web site. Click on "About Us."

QUESTION:

13. Washington State's House of Representatives and Senate, in Olympia, are different than the federal U.S. House of Representatives and Senate in Washington D.C. In Olympia, there are two State House members and one State Senator for each district. How many legislative districts do they represent?

Do you want to know how this state's voters cast their ballots in a previous election? Go back to www.vote.wa.gov. In the upper left of the page, again find "Elections Menu" and scroll your cursor down to "Other Resources." When the menu appears, move your mouse to "Election Results Archive" and click. Now, click on "November 7 General Election" for the year 2000 and you have a wealth of information awaiting you.

QUESTION:

14. (A) By clicking on "Ballot Measures," then on "Initiative 728," what do you find was the percentage of Washington voters who voted "Yes?"
(B) By clicking on "Federal Officers," then on "President/Vice President," what do you find was the number of

political parties that received votes for President/Vice President in our state?

Want to know who your elected officials are? Return to www.vote.wa.gov. In the upper left of the page, again find "Elections Menu" and scroll your cursor down to "Contacts." When the menu appears, move your mouse to "Elected Officials" and click.

You see those who represent us in the United States Senate and House of Representatives in our national capital. You also see a listing of our statewide elected officials with a link to their offices, and a link to our state Legislature.

QUESTION:

15. What is the number of statewide elected offices in Washington State?

A common question asked by new voters when preparing to cast their votes on a ballot issue such as an initiative is, "What is fact and what is opinion?" The purpose of this next activity is to show you a resource available to you when election time comes. Go to www.vote.wa.gov. Under the "Elections Menu," position your cursor over "Previous Elections" and choose 2001. Now, under "The 2001 Ballot" in the upper left portion of this page, click on the "Online Voters Guide," then select "Ballot Measures." Here you will see what the online voters guide looks like when presenting statewide measures to the voters.

QUESTION:

16. What are the three options presented to you below each ballot measure's official ballot title?

The "Complete Text" of the measure is an objective source of information to fully acquaint yourself with the issue. The "Explanatory Statement" is an attempt to present an objective overview of two things about the measure.

QUESTION:

17. The "Explanatory Statement" explains the law as it _____ and the _____ if the measure becomes law.

The least objective (yet very democratic) option is the "Arguments For and Against" section. When you view these opinions for both sides of the issue, you need to be aware that these views are someone's personal opinion, the same as when you read the "letters to the editor" or "editorial opinion" sections of the newspaper.

QUESTIONS:

18. What disclaimer comment at the top of the "Arguments For or Against" page reminds you that the objectivity of the arguments is not guaranteed?
19. At the bottom of each ballot measure, what information is provided that reminds you that the statements FOR and AGAINST are not objective information sources?

These questions will help you discover some of the most relevant election dates and acquaint you with the elections calendar. First, go to www.vote.wa.gov and select "More Information," then "State Elections Calendar."

QUESTIONS:

20. In September of an election year, what important election takes place? (Hint: All elections in Washington state are held on Tuesday.)
21. In early and late October of an election year, what two deadlines for the General election occur that are important to would-be voters? (A) _____ (B) _____
22. At the end of August, County Auditors must have _____ available for the September Primary. Following this pattern, in what month must County Auditors have the same item ready for the General Election? _____
23. In what part of the month of November is the General Election always held? (Early, middle, or late) _____
24. Using the calendar, what is the amount of time the state law allows the Office of the Secretary of State to certify the final state General election results?

Congratulations! At the start of this activity you were asked to acquaint yourself with some information and resources available to voters, discover some ways to evaluate information, and become more familiar with significant dates and deadlines of the voting/election process. Your new knowledge is an essential step toward the title "citizen" which Brandeis spoke of and a critical ingredient in Phillips' "vigilance."

ANSWERS:

1. President, Vice President

2. Lieutenant
3. Five
4. Yes, 25
5. NP, "Non Partisan" which means they are not affiliated with a particular political party
6. Six years
7. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell
8. No, so we always have one U.S. Senator with experience
9. Two years
10. Answer depends on the district the student lives in
11. Incumbent means the one currently holding office
12. Depends on the Initiative chosen
13. 49 districts
14. (A) 71.73% voted "Yes"
(B) 10 political parties received votes for President/Vice President
15. 9 statewide elected offices
16. Explanatory Statement; Arguments For and Against; Complete Text
17. Now exists; effect
18. The following arguments were prepared by committees appointed in accordance with state law. The Office of the Secretary of State is not authorized to edit arguments, nor is it responsible for their content.
19. The statements prepared by committees and supporters of the arguments
20. State Primary
21. (A) Deadlines for voter registration by mail
(B) Voter registration in person
22. Absentee ballots; October
23. Early
24. 30 days